

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 2197

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, ECIN, NI, MR, XA
SUBJECT: AFRICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD NIERIA: MAURITANIA

REF: STATE 208244

1. MAURITANIAN RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA AND WITH PRESENT
MILITARY GOVERNMENT APPEAR TO BE CORDIAL. UNTIL RECENTLY,
RELATIONSHIP WAS LARGELY
CEREMONIAL WITH SUBSTANTIVE INTERACTION LIMITED TO OAU
ISSUES AND VENUES. BUT WITH DISCUSSION, NEGOTIATION, SIGNATURE,
AND NOW BEGINNING IMPLEMENTATION OF ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST
AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS), MAURITANIAN-NIGERIAN ECONOMIC AND
POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP HAS ENTERED NEW PHASE.

2. SHIFT FROM CEREMONIAL/BROAD POLITICAL TO PRACTICAL ECONOMIC
WAS IN SENSE SYMBOLIZED BY TWO QUITE DIFFERENT HIGH LEVEL
MAURITANIAN VISITS TO NIGERIA THIS YEAR. PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH
FLEW TO NIGERIA IN FEBRUARY 1977 TO ATTEND FESTAC CLOSING
CEREMONIES, ATTEND KADUNA SIRDAR, AND MEET WITH NIGERIAN
CHIEF OF STATE. WIDE COVERAGE OF F I HOUR VISIT BY MAURITANIAN
MEDIA REFLECTED AND (INADVERTENTLY) UNDEGVLCORED LARGELY
CEREMOSKAL CHARACTER OF PRESIDENT'S ENCOUNTER WITH GENERAL
OBASEHO AND NIGERIAN LEADERSHIP. SECOND VISIT DURING
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FIRST WEEK SEPTEMBER BY MINSTER STATE/NATIONAL POLITICAL BUREAU
MEMBER SIDI OULD SHEIKH 'ABDALLAHI XAS "ALL BUSINESS". AT
AIRPORT PRESS CONFERENCE ON HIS RETURN FROM FOUR DAYS IN LAGOS,
PLANNING MINISTER DECLARED PURPOSE OF TRIP HAD BEEN TO DISCUSS
FUTURE ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN MAURITANIA AND NIGERIA,
AND REPORTED THAT IN ADDITION TO DELIVERING MESSAGE FROM
PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH TO GENERAL OBASANJO, HE HAD MET

WITH FOREIGN MINISTER, MINISTER OF MINES, AND MINISTER OF PETROLEUM. NNPIG TWO COUNTRIES HAD IN PAST FEW MONTHS SIGNED COMMERCIAL AGREEMENT AND FISHERIES AGREEMENT, SIDI DECLARED HE HAD DISCUSSED DEVELOPMENT, EXPANSION, AND DEEPENDING OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES WITHIN STRUCTURE OF ECOWAS, AND CONCLUDED THAT "HIS VIST HAD OPENED UP INTEREST-ING NEW PERSPECTIVES OF COOPERATION BETWEEN MAURITANI AND NIGERIA".

3. UNLIKE SOME WHO ARE GEOGRAPHICALLY CLOSER OR POLITICALLY/ ECONOMICALLY MORE COMPETETIVE WITH NIGERIA, MAURITANIAS ARE NEITHER OVERAWED NOR FRIGHTENED BY ECONOMIC, MILITARY, AND POLITICAL POWERHOUSE TO SOUTHEAST. INDEED, SINCE PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH AS ONE OF FOUNDING FATHERS OF O.A.U. IS RECOGNIZED BY MOST IF NOT ALL AFRICANS -- INCLUDING NEW MILITARY LEADERS OF NIGERIA ACCORDING TO SIDI 'ABDALLAHI -- AS ONE OF AFRICA'S ELDER STATESMEN, MAURITQNIANS ARE NOT UPSET BY PROSPECT OF NIGERIAN LEADER(S) JOINING AFRICAN LEADERSHIP GROUP OR BE-COMING ADDITIONAL SPOKESMEN FOR CONTINENT. FINALLY, MOST SENIOR LEVELS OF MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT ARE ULTIMATE REALISTS WHO RECOGNIZE AND FRANKLY ACKNOWLEDGE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND MILITARY WEAKNESS OF MAURITANIA. THEY HAVE NEITHER ANY ILLUSIONS NOR ASPIRATIONS RE COMPETING WITH NIGERIAN COLOSSUS. INSTEAD, THEY WILL WORK HARD TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN CORDIAL AND EFFECE REALTIONSHIP WITH LAGOS; THEY WILL SOFT PEDAL ANY FUTURE DISAGREEMENTS AND SEEK TO AVOID HEAD-ON CONFRONTATIONS.

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